

Interoperability Newsletter

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Summer SIGB Meeting
July 12

COML Committee
Meeting May 17

Woodward Tornado

An EF3 tornado struck the town of Woodward just after midnight Sunday, April 15. A large portion of Woodward was destroyed. Tragically, six people were killed as a result of the deadly tornado outbreak; three among the six were children. Nearly thirty people were sent to the hospital with injuries ranging in severity. With little to no warning time before the tornado hit, the citizens of Woodward were blindsided.

Responding agencies included OHP and OEM; as well as numerous fire, EMS, and law enforcement agencies from neighboring counties.

Captain Shawn Lockwood with the OHP's Law Enforcement Technology Development division was on scene in Oklahoma Command 2 and had this to say about the experience: Oklahoma Command 2 responded to Woodward at approximately 3am on Sunday April 15th. Command 2's role was to assist in establishing and maintaining communications as needed. Two operators from the OHP, along with a Communications Technician from DPS's Communications and Electronics Section, staffed the position until 4pm that day. During our operational period we provided equipment as well as voice and data communications for the OHP Troopers on the ground in Woodward Ok. At the largest point of the operation there were over twenty perimeter sites maintained by OHP units to provide security and 4 teams of Troopers operating under the REMS unit that we were supporting. The equipment served its purpose well and allowed these users and command staff, both in Woodward and else-

where, to have a communications point that was otherwise nonexistent.

Matt Lehenbauer, Woodward County Emergency Manager, took on the role as Incident Commander during the incident; he had some interesting feedback regarding communications.

Due to the primarily limited geographical size of the Woodward-area tornado event of April 15th, VHF tactical channels were utilized extensively within the major debris area. The VCALL10 channel was underused, but this was expected as most public safety entities remain using State Fire and State Law for these contacts.

Our procedures call for bridging VCALL, UCALL and 8/ICALL with LLAW channels so we have full

public safety band interoperability during a major incident. Our budgetary restrictions have not allowed us to obtain an 800 MHz radio as of yet, however.

I was in the unfortunate situation of being the only experienced COML/COMT in northwest Oklahoma, whereby also having to assume IC duties for this event. The issue of a lack of qualified COML and COMT personnel is already being addressed by OKHS. In fact, nearly every major communications issue we had or potentially could have had is already a work in progress by the OKOHS. This is a field-proven sign that we are on the right track. Issues are still there in educating public safety about the OK-FOG, but that has always been an anticipated issue that will resolve itself over time.

Matt also stressed that continued COML/COMT education is critical; as well as, bridging systems for better interoperability.



Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS)

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and wireless phone carriers have joined forces to develop the Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS) to increase public safety. CMAS is the interface to the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) service being introduced this year.

Basically, it enables the public to receive significant emergency alerts similar to text messages on their mobile phones without a sign up or cost to the alerting authorities or the public. FEMA's Open Platform for Emergency Networks (IPAWS-OPEN) will allow authorized public



safety authorities to send alerts via broadcast technology to prevent delays that occur due to service congestion in emergency situations.

Because there is no need to opt in to begin receiving these alerts there is some concern that the public may panic when they begin to receive them. As a result, education may need to be provided on the state and local level to minimize any issues.

Imminent threats, Amber Alerts, and presidential messages will all be types of messages sent, but most will be issued by the National Weather Service. Alerts may be issued by state and local officials after completing the required authorization steps; which include: an agreement with FEMA, approval on the state level, and training.

Carriers such as AT&T have provided lists of models that are capable of receiving CMAS notifications and at least 20 agencies have received approval from FEMA to send out alerts.

For more information please visit FEMA's website at www.fema.gov/emergency/ipaws/emas.shtm.

COUASI Updates TIC-P

The Central Oklahoma Urban Area recently completed the update to the Tactical Interoperability Communications Plan (TIC-P). The TIC-P documents the interoperable communications governance structures, technology assets, usage policies, and procedures for the seven counties within the Central Oklahoma Urban Area. It also describes how communications assets are shared and prioritized and the process by which agencies

can activate the assets in the area.



Originally, each designated Urban Area within the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Program was required to develop a TIC-P and test the plan. The Central Oklahoma Urban Area developed an initial TIC-P, which was validated through a Department of Homeland Security –evaluated exercise September 13, 2006, in Norman.

Among the many updates to the plan, the TIC-P assigns specific Oklahoma Wireless Information Network (OKWIN) talkgroups. The original plan was to pre-assign one to each area, there were some concerns regarding this and the decision was made to have a Communications Coordinator assign them as needed. To request an OKWIN talkgroup, you will need to contact the State Office of Emergency Management at 1-800-800-2481 and speak with a Communications Coordinator. To view the Central Oklahoma TIC-P, visit www.ioc.ok.gov.

Recognition Procedure Approved

The Communications Unit Leader (COML) Committee recently voted to approve the Certified State of Oklahoma COML/Communications Unit Technician (COMT) Recognition Procedure. The document outlines the process by which individuals may become recognized as a Certified COML/COMT at the state-level only; it is not for individuals seeking recognition at the local jurisdiction or agency-specific level.

Briefly, the procedure for recognition as a Certified State of Oklahoma COML/COMT includes the completion of the All-Hazards COML/COMT Course, completion of a Position Task Book, and demonstration of the Oklahoma-specific competencies. The document also describes the process by which the Certified State of Oklahoma COML/COMT designation may be renewed and outlines the recordkeeping process.

Individuals seeking recognition as an agency-specific COML/COMT are considered qualified once they complete the All-Hazards COML/COMT Course—unless otherwise specified by their home agency. To view the procedure or to view additional information regarding the Oklahoma Communications Unit Program, visit www.ioc.ok.gov.

NECP Goal 2

The National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) is a strategic plan developed by The Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) that sets goals and identifies key national priorities to enhance governance, planning, technology, training and exercises and disaster communications capabilities. Through OEC, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security defined a series of goals that establish a minimum level of interoperable communications and a deadline for local, state, tribal and federal agencies to achieve that minimum level.

Oklahoma has made it a priority to achieve each of the three goals set by the NECP. A successful demonstration of NECP Goal 1 took place in Oklahoma City during the “Oklahoma City National Memorial Annual Remembrance

Ceremony” on April 19, 2010. Goal 2 was submitted in October 2011 when approximately 45 percent of Oklahoma counties submitted capability and performance data to OKOHS. Unfortunately, the goal was 75 percent and as a result, OEC has decided that each county must be in compliance to participate in workshops funded by their office.

To fulfill Goal 2, each state is required to report on interoperable communications data collected at the county level. As a part of this process, states will be assessing their counties’ ability to demonstrate response-level emergency communications using a web-based evaluation tool, incorporating information obtained from the various counties using a real even within each individual county. This event could have occurred anytime within the past

three years and can be an emergency incident, disaster or a planned event.

The Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security is asking all County Managers who have not completed Goal 2 for assistance with the data collection process, based on their knowledge of the various communications-related capabilities within their individual counties and their involvement at various levels in the support and implementation of interoperability strategies and practices.

Our office is willing to assist with this process in any way, as it is imperative that our state be in compliance with Goal 2. The link to the website is on our website along with step-by-step instructions to complete both surveys.

(See map on next page)
